

Taos Mountain Energy Foods brings jobs to Questa

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Four years ago, Taos Mountain Energy Foods (also known as Taos Mountain Energy Bar) started out as a tiny, two-person food manufacturer operated by its founders, Brooks Thostenson and Kyle Hawari. Today, the business not only has 15 full-time employees but plans to add at least another 15 over the next five years.

The company produces nutritious organic snack bars and is expected to hit \$3 million in sales in 2015 alone, selling to Whole Foods and 1,500 other retailers nationwide.

“After quickly realizing there was demand for a local, healthy and tasty snack,” Taos Mountain Energy Foods president Brooks Thostenson said, “we began to look for a larger space than our current production line in the Taos County Economic Development Corp’s Taos Food Center.”

Thostenson and Hawari were worried that they might have to leave the state to expand their business, but several regional economic development agencies and

organizations, including the Española-based Northern New Mexico Food Hub and Regional Development Corporation, stepped in to keep the company in northern New Mexico.

In the end, a deal between Taos Mountain Energy Foods, the Village of Questa and the New Mexico Economic Development Department secured \$437,000 in improvements for a previously vacant, solar-powered warehouse in the Questa Industrial Park. Taos Mountain Energy Foods will move in as the building's anchor tenant.

The renovations are scheduled to be completed this fall and should help Questa regroup and revitalize after the Chevron molybdenum mine permanently closed in June 2014.

Past, current and future partnerships

Thostenson and Hawari are grateful for the help their company has received over the years, and they are committed to lending a helping hand to other regional businesses in turn.

"Los Alamos National Laboratory provided assistance to us in various forms and through various partnerships," Thostenson noted. "In 2013, Taos Mountain Energy Foods was the largest recipient of the Venture Acceleration Fund, for example, and we also have been a Northern New Mexico 20/20 Campaign award winner. The New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership helped us extensively with lean manufacturing processes and offered insights into enhanced systems, protocols and operating procedures."

Thostenson and Hawari look forward to additional partnerships with Los Alamos and other entities. They hope that another food company will take over their current production line in Taos, for instance, and they also have discussed the possibility of helping transform the Questa building into a local food hub.

In the meantime, they are busy watching over the renovations in Questa.

"As far as I know, we will be the only energy bar company that is 100 percent solar-powered," Thostenson said. "Producing our products with solar energy falls right in line with our brand's business ethics."

Thostenson and Hawari also are busy setting up distributions through United Natural Foods, Inc., the country's largest natural food broker.

For further information on the economic development initiatives mentioned in this article, visit the [Taos Food Center](#), [Regional Development Corporation](#), [New Mexico Economic Development Department](#) and [New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership](#) websites. The Regional Development Corporation's page includes information on the Venture Acceleration Fund and the Northern New Mexico 20/20 Campaign.

To learn more about the Northern New Mexico Food Hub, you might enjoy reading the [Community food projects win \\$149,000 in grants](#) article in Community Connections' November 2014 issue.